



NPL RESEARCH MINNESOTA DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIES

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A few years ago, as I was unpacking years of stamp accumulation, I came across the item shown in *Figure 1*, which appeared, ostensibly, to be a plate number strip of five of Scott 3082. I later began to question why this item was saved in this particular plate number configuration. Any suggestion that this could be a *booklet pane* was implausible. Compelled by curiosity to seek an explanation for this item ultimately led me to NPL research sources.

Historically, the basic plate layout for U.S. booklets is different from that of sheets. This different layout, principally based on the use of wide gutters, enabled booklet panes to be efficiently cut into individual booklet panes with straight edges on three sides, but perforated between the stamps.¹ Yet, each stamp in *Figure 1* is perforated on all four sides. Hardly a booklet!

It wasn't too long before I encountered a reading reference to MDI "blue" booklets, produced by Minnesota Diversified Industries. Wanting to know more about these "blue" booklets, I discovered that MDI is a non-profit social service organization that trains and creates employment for people with disabilities and disadvantages. It provides outsource fulfillment and distribution, packaging, and



Figure 1

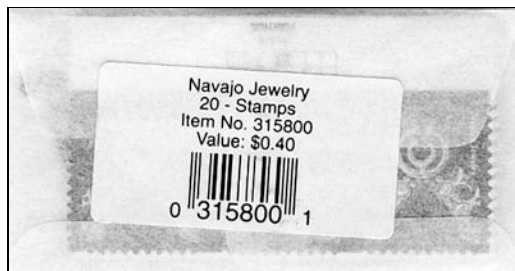


Figure 2
Glassine Vending Packet

storage options for clients, including the USPS, a recurring contract partner. Glassine postage stamp vending packets [see *Figure 2*] have been assembled and packaged by MDI. MDI provided just-in-time inventory services for Postmark America, a USPS-funded retail store in the Mall of America that sold USPS-related merchandise. Most recently, MDI has been awarded substantial USPS contracts to produce bulk mail and letter mail plastic totes. From all accounts, MDI accomplishes its social and service mandates.

¹ An excellent article illustrating one type of plate layout for booklets is: "The U.S. One-Cent Series of 1908, Horizontal Pair Imperforate Between – Revising Booklet Pane Questions," *Opinions VII*, Philatelic Foundation, 2002, pp. 31-40.

So, what about these MDI “blue” booklets? In the mid-1990s, to meet an early public demand, MDI fabricated makeshift vending booklets using both water-activated and self-adhesive definitive and commemorative stamps. These booklets were mounted between white card stock covers printed in *blue*, the front of which had a rectangular opening through which the stamps could then be seen [see *Figure 3*]. The dimensions of an MDI booklet cover are similar to those of standard vending booklet covers.

The *Scott Specialized Catalogue* initially refused to recognize these “jury rigged” booklets, but ultimately relented and assigned separate booklet numbers and listed them as “blue” or “makeshift vending booklets.”² Blue booklets typically comprise 15 stamps, although there are some with two panes of 15.

MDI booklets made from sheet stamps³ were hand-assembled by tearing sheet stamps into blocks of 15 and using a spot of glue to attach the intact block to the back cover.⁴ These blocks were then folded to fit within the booklet covers. *Figure 4* shows the exploded right booklet from *Figure 3*.⁵ This was not actually the first time that U.S. booklets had been made using stock printed from plates for sheet stamps. Scott 2276a, the 22¢ Flag with Fireworks booklet pane of 20 [2 x 10], was made from sheets of 2276. For 2276a, however, the perforator was configured to remove alternating rows of perforations and to trim off the right sheet margin to provide the three straight-edged sides.⁶

Other “blue” booklets contain self-adhesive stamps.⁷ These booklets were made using stamps, including the backing paper, taken from printed web sections that were originally intended to be processed into convertible booklets of 20 stamps [plus a



Type I

Type II

Figure 3
MDI Blue Booklet – Front Cover

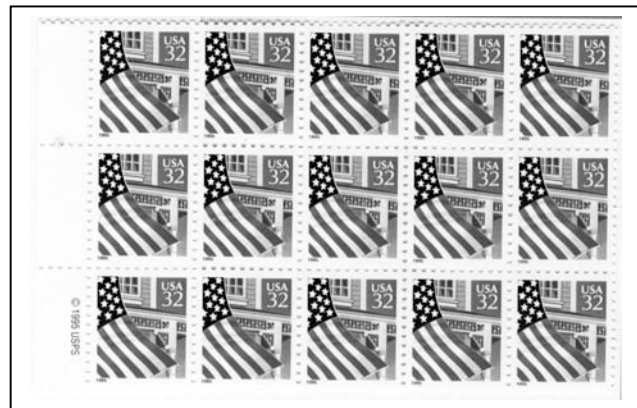


Figure 4
Exploded MDI Sheet Stamp Booklet

² For many collectors, the listing by Scott caused the blue booklets to become “legitimate” collectibles.

³ BK243-258, BK272-274, and BK277-278.

⁴ Typically, the block of 15 included selvage from at least one sheet margin. This selvage was used as the glue point to attach the block to the back cover.

⁵ The USPS did issue an “official” version of this booklet, Scott 2916a, with one and two panes of 10 stamps in the normal booklet configuration, i.e., straight edges on three sides and perforated between.

⁶ The *Durland Standard Plate Number Catalog* (2005) notes that the two plates used to print the sheet stamp, 2276, were also used to print the booklet, 2276a. In addition, a third plate, not used for the sheet stamp, was employed to print the booklet.

⁷ The issues were: 32¢ Pink Rose [BK178A-F], 32¢ Flag Over Porch [BK226A-B & 227], 32¢ Midnight Angel [BK233A-E], and 32¢ Love Cherub [BK235 & 236].

“reorder” label]. The three stamp printers⁸ used specially designed die cut mats to score out panes of 14, 15, or 16 stamps which were then glued into the blue booklet covers. The peel strips were removed from these booklets so they could be folded into a vending format, thereby eliminating plate numbers. What distinguishes these blue booklets from the blue sheet stamp booklets is that the self-adhesive booklets cannot be replicated by cutting up the regular 20-stamp convertible booklets sold by USPS.

Deciding what and how to collect of the MDI booklets is confounded by a number of factors:

1. There are two different outside front covers. See *Figure 3*. Type I has a much narrower white band and the viewing portal is a bit lower. Booklets with the Type I cover, which were used only on the early 32¢ Pink Rose booklets [BK178A, 178B, and combo 178E], were wrapped in cellophane rather than being taped shut with a circular self-adhesive seal as with Type II.⁹
2. There are four different outside back covers. See *Figure 5*. Booklets with the Type I front cover have no writing in the white section of the outside back cover; rather, a label listing product information, similar to the one in *Figure 2* above, was attached to the outside of the cellophane wrapper.¹⁰ For those booklets with Type II front covers, there are three different outside back covers, Types II, II-a, and III. The only distinguishing feature between Type II and Type II-a is “Item No.” and “Item #.” Type III is distinguished by a UPC bar code, a different location of the circular “10% Post-Consumer Waste” label, and a different ordering of the product information.

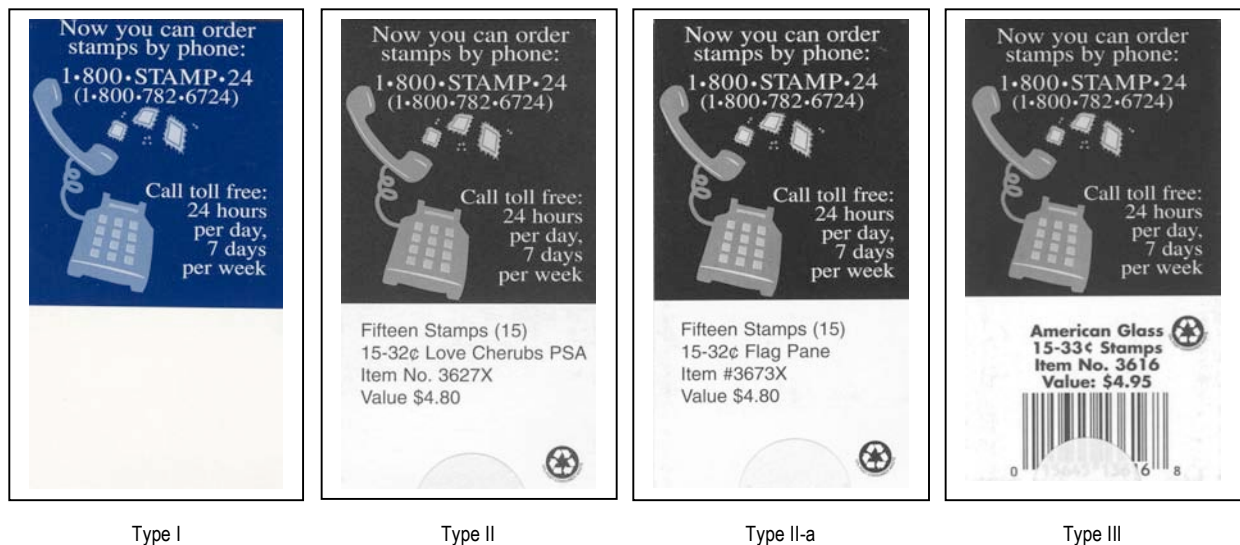


Figure 5
Outside Back Covers

3. Booklet item numbers with the suffix “X.” Certain stamp vending machines required consecutive booklets in the vending queue be turned 90 degrees to prevent the accidental delivery of two booklets. Booklets packed for these machines have an item number ending with an X [see the Type II and II-a covers in *Figure 5*]. Booklets destined for a different type

⁸ Avery Dennison, Banknote Corporation of America, and Stamp Venturers.

⁹ Type I front cover booklets wrapped in cellophane were quickly discontinued when they were found to jam vending machines. Consequently, these are scarcer than the same booklet with the Type II front cover.

¹⁰ According to the *Scott Specialized*, there are three varieties of this label, adding further to the confusion.

of vending machine do not have this X. Eight MDI booklets have common product numbers with and without an X.

4. MDI booklets were not always assembled in the same way. Sheet and self-adhesive booklets were mounted between the covers in both an upright readable position and sometimes in an inverted [the stamp is upside down] orientation. In addition, blocks of stamps, torn from larger sheets to produce the sheet stamp booklets, will have different marginal markings. This is also true for self-adhesive panes that come with different writing on the liner [backing] paper.
5. Reorder labels for self-adhesive booklets can appear in multiple positions or not at all. There are four positions that a reorder label can appear in these booklets - positions 11, 12, 13, or 14.¹¹ Moreover, a booklet may not include the reorder label due to the manner in which the stamps were originally cut from the printed web. An example of this latter occurrence is shown in *Figure 6*. Notice that this was originally a 16-stamp pane, with one stamp removed later to produce the 15-stamp blue booklet.¹²



Figure 6
A 16-Stamp Pane With One Stamp Removed

MDI booklets are generally available, although they are not a common item in most dealer stock. The price of the booklets varies. Most of the sheet stamp booklets of 15 catalogue at \$9-\$11. Booklets made from self-adhesive stamps can be expensive, ranging in catalogue value from \$10 to \$65.

Information useful to the collector of MDI booklets is typically scattered. The *Scott Specialized* coverage suffers in at least two respects: [1] the booklets are difficult to find in the listings and [2] booklet varieties are overly summarized or not recognized at all. Fortunately, two good sources are available to help the collector decide what and how to collect these booklets. The first is from the Plate Number Coil Society¹³ and the second is from the U.S. Stamp Society.¹⁴

Getting back to that “plate number strip of five” in *Figure 1*, it should now be no surprise that it is really a piece [one-third] stripped out of MDI BK250.

¹¹To add additional complexity, the reorder label on BK178, 32¢ Pink Rose, came in two formats, with and without circular die cuts.

¹²The location of the removed stamp varies: BK178 [32¢ Pink Rose] from the top or bottom row; BK226B and 227 [32¢ Flag Over Porch] it is the lower right or upper left stamp; BK233 [32¢ Midnight Angel] it can come from row 1, 2, 3, 7, or 8.

¹³<http://www.pnc3.org>. Select US Booklets from the main menu then scroll down to MDI (Minnesota Diversified Industries) Booklets.

¹⁴“Folded-Style and Pressure Sensitive Booklet Checklist,” *Research Paper #2*, 13th ed. This includes all booklets from 1977 to 2004.